

New study reveals impact of eating disorders on Native-Americans

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Scientists in Connecticut have carried out one of the first psychological studies into eating disorders in Native American (NA) populations. The research, published in *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, provides new insights into the extent to which Native American populations experience eating disorders, revealing that women are more likely to report behavioral symptoms than men, while challenging views that NA men and ethnically white men will experience different psychological symptoms.

The team, led by Professor Ruth Striegel-Moore from Wesleyan University in Connecticut, studied data taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health for over 10,000 men and women with an average age of 22. Of these, 236 women and 253 men were either Native American or Inuit.

Research into eating disorders in Native Americans has lagged behind research of other mental disorders, leaving many unanswered basic questions about prevalence in major demographic groups of populations indigenous to the US, including Native American, Native Hawaiian, or Alaskan Natives.

"Little is known about eating disorder symptoms in Native American populations for several reasons," said Striegel-Moore. "Even though the U.S. government recognizes over 500 NA tribes one of the biggest research challenges is to find an adequate sample size. Our aim was to examine prevalence of behavioral symptoms of eating disorders in a

public access data base to get an initial estimate of the extent to which young NA adults experience such problems."

The team confirmed the theory that NA women were more likely than NA men to report behavioral symptoms of eating disorders, revealing that regardless of race, ethnicity or nationality, research consistently shows that women are more vulnerable to developing disordered eating behaviors or full syndrome eating disorders than men.

The team also found a parallel between NA women and ethnically white women when considering the prevalence of [binge eating](#), purging and "ever having been diagnosed with an eating disorder."

"This commonality between NA and white women refutes the myth that eating disorders are problems that only affect white girls and women" said Striegel-Moore.

Finally the team found that there was no significant difference between NA men and ethnically white men, again demonstrating how the affects of eating disorders are not restricted by racial groups.

While this research was one of the first into the psychological effect of eating disorders in NA populations it can now lead to further, longer studies. The team's findings were based on 7 days which is shorter than similar studies conducted over 28 days. Further research will also be conducted into the attitudinal symptoms of eating disorders, compared to the behavioral symptoms being discussed in this paper.

"This research provides us with a first glimpse into the extent to which young adult NA populations experience behavioral symptoms of eating disorders," concluded Striegel-Moore. "In the eating disorder field this type of epidemiological study has lagged behind other research, but now we have a foundation to study the distribution of [eating disorders](#) and

identify psychological risk factors in Native American populations."

Provided by Wiley

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